

## Episode #1017 Ephesians 3 Part 2-The Dispensation of Grace

I. The purpose of Paul's epistle to the Ephesians is to tell us what God's present purpose is in all His work today. This includes His work in the world and in the individual believer. Ephesians is the book of God's present purpose, the book of being "in Christ," and the book of God's grace.

II. I have called the book of Ephesians "the book of God's present purpose." Even more specifically, chapter 3 is the chapter of God's present purpose. We learn here what it is that God is doing today. Verse 2 tells us that we live in the dispensation of the grace of God.

III. Grace is God's desire to bless. It is His passion to deliver the sinful. It is His unlimited love in expression. It is His love and favor to the undeserving. It is His unrecompensed kindness and favor. It is God's love to His creatures who do not deserve His love. Grace is never withheld or lessened because of faults. Grace cannot incur a debt, and is never the payment nor overpayment of a debt. Ephesians 4:32. The great truth of the dispensation of grace is that God is dealing graciously with us!

### IV. Grace Versus Justice.

- A. Justice is God rendering to people what is due and right. Genesis 18:25. In justice, favor or punishment is given to the deserving.
- B. Grace and justice are both fundamental aspects of God's character, yet they are polar characteristics which cannot act at the same time.
- C. We are not saying that there was no grace before Acts 28:28! God's grace was first shown to Adam and Eve in the garden when He made them coats of skins to cover their nakedness, rather than just letting them die. God has shown grace from the beginning, but not unmixed grace.
  1. God wiped out all life in the flood (justice), yet He saved Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark (grace).
  2. God commanded Israel to wipe out the Canaanites (justice), but He saved Rahab and her family alive (grace).
  3. God destroyed Jerusalem by means of Babylon (justice), yet He delivered a small remnant and later restored the nation (grace).
- D. Romans 5:21. Grace became prominent in Acts, but it was not a dispensation of grace because it was still mixed with justice.
  1. Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira died for lying to the Holy Spirit.
  2. Acts 8. Simon the sorcerer was threatened with death for his wickedness.
  3. Acts 10. Cornelius was blessed because his works earned it.
  4. Acts 12. Herod died when he took God's glory for himself.
  5. Acts 13. Bar-jesus was struck blind for withstanding the gospel.
  6. I Corinthians 11. Many Corinthians sickened and died for eating and drinking the Passover bread and cup unworthily.
  7. Romans 1:16, 3:1-2. Pure grace cannot make such distinctions!
  8. Romans 11:21-22. Goodness and severity do not go side-by-side in a dispensation of complete grace.
  9. Romans 15:27. Grace cannot incur a debt.
  10. Romans was the last epistle written before Acts 28:28. There can only be one conclusion: Acts was not the dispensation of grace!

### V. Grace Versus Covenants.

- A. A covenant is an agreement.

1. Some of God's covenants are conditional. God agrees to do His part when certain human requirements are met.
  2. Some of God's covenants are unconditional, wherein God agrees to do something regardless of human actions.
- B. The making or declaring of a covenant could be an act of pure grace on God's part. However, once a covenant has been declared and ratified, keeping it cannot be considered in any way as an act of grace, since it is then the fulfilling of an obligation or debt.
- C. Some have called the new covenant a "covenant of grace" and claimed we are under this. They ignore Jeremiah 31:30, a statement connected with the new covenant.
- D. To suggest that any of our blessings today come to us because God fulfilled an agreement is to trample on the grace of God.

VI. Conclusion: God's present purpose is He is currently demonstrating how gracious He is for all time to come. Grace is God's love and favor to the undeserving. God is acting today only and exclusively in grace. Justice gives people exactly what they deserve, whereas grace gives God's love and favor to the undeserving, so grace and justice cannot act toward the same person at the same time. The keeping of a covenant is a duty, since it is fulfilling and agreement, so keeping a covenant cannot be gracious.